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Music as the “Supra-Narrative Content” of Film Marija Ćirić:

Vidljivi prostori muzike.

Superlibretto – Govor muzike u

filmu [Visible Areas Of Music:

Super-Libretto – The Speech of Music In Film],

Filum, Kragujevac, 2015, 208.

Unlike in Western musicology, in Serbian musicology the study of popular music genres has for a long time occupied the margins of scholarly interest. There are many reasons for that, but two of them undoubtedly come at the top of the list: first, the fact that not even the study of our art music has enjoyed adequate recognition in our overall academic environment and second, that for a time, there was the prejudice that studying popular musical genres, as opposed to studying “elite” art music, is not worthy of scholarly engagement. Fortunately, over the past two decades, popular music has “challenged” a number of scholars in cultural studies to analyze and interpret the phenomenon of its appearance and social impact.

The study *Vidljivi prostori muzike. Superlibretto – govor muzike u filmu* (Visible

Areas of Music. Superlibretto – The Speech of Music in Film; Kragujevac, FILUM, 2015) by media theorist Marija Ćirić, who embarked on studying film music, stressing its privilege of “possessing elements from both opposing polarities (mentioned above)”, occupies “no man’s land” between these two seemingly contrasting musical territories, which keep coming closer together and even overlap. Stressing film music as “something in between” popular and elite music, Ćirić thus begins by presenting different theoretical positions regarding the role and significance of music in the “art of moving pictures” and then makes an original contribution to the field by proclaiming film music a kind of “super-libretto”, the “supra-narrative” content of every film, directing her entire research project toward specific practical results. Regarding the latter, the author decided to analyze film music by Zoran Simjanović.

Her study is one of the first monograph studies in the interdisciplinary domain of media theory and musicology, which, in scholarly terms, examines the role of music in film. Its two-part (roughly speaking) makeup might be defined as encompassing the theory and practice of film music. Namely, the first part of the study, titled “Vidljivi prostori muzike: ka teoriji superlibreta” (Visible Areas of Music: Toward a Theory of the Super-libretto), presents a short history of music in film, warning the reader in advance not only that film music occupies a position in between elite and popular music, but also that this “dialectical” situation is immanent to film music itself. In this part of the book, the author confidently acts as a sort of “moderator” of the debate about the import of sound and music’s potential roles in film,

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its “supra-narrative”, and the question why without music, film as a complex art form becomes almost unthinkable. Relying on authorities in this area, most notably Theodor Adorno and Hanns Eisler, who were, on the one hand, probably the first to occupy a critical position regarding the “inaudible function” of music in film, while, on the other hand, proclaiming it a logical consequence of the era of mass media rule, which privileged the eye’s ability to see over the ear’s ability to hear; Eisenstein and Prokofiev and their notion of a “contrapuntal relationship between sound and image”; Claudia Gorbman, who, whilst “siding with music”, still stressed that viewers were not expected to listen to film music actively (which is also suggested by her key study, *Unheard Melodies*); Max Steiner, a famous composer in this genre, who argued against using popular songs in film music, because it risked distracting the viewer’s attention from the plot (*sic!*), and Michel Chion, to name but a few, the author takes leave of them to embark on her own theoretical method, wherein she confidently presents arguments in favour of introducing the concept of “super-libretto” as a term that adequately positions the meaning of music as Chion’s “added value of film”. In the process of producing that theory, one learns the surprising fact that the thesis of the diegetic and non-diegetic status of music in film was posited by Claudia Gorbman only in the 1980s, although, of course, many a theorist had already reflected on the function of music in film and ways of exposing it. Numerous other categorizations of music in film, whether included in the scene or not, whether partaking of the emotional aspect of the story or whether un-empathetic, as well as various

other aspects, economic and sociological, which are presented to the reader, point to the interdisciplinarity of the topic, which today, after more than a hundred years since the birth of cinematography, remains insufficiently explored. Finally, over the past few decades, this scholarly field has been enriched with a number of neologisms (e.g. auditory tri-circle, didactic counterpoint, audiovision, etc.), whose “constructor” was mostly Chion, mentioned above, the famous theorist and composer of film music, which rather precisely point out the multilayered character of sound in film, where music occupies a primary position.

To prevent her study from ending up as little more than a history or theory of film music or a collection of examples from already studied foreign films and their musical “support”, Marija Ćirić devotes the second part of her study, “Super-libretto: Identity in the Visible Sphere of Music”, to the oeuvre of our pre-eminent composer of film music, Zoran Simjanović. Bearing in mind his applied-music opus, comprising over 60 feature films, 50 TV films and series, as well as over 50 animated and short films, and films in other genres, the author analyzes the way Simjanović used musical means to construct different identities of protagonists onscreen and topics of interest of the directors with whom he collaborated. In that sense, Ćirić develops a special discourse on the phenomenon of identity, from its definition to categorization as private and social identity, also including the fragmentation of identity, creation of ideological identities, opposition between the construction of multiculturalism and national identity and their reconciliation in the intercultural sphere, all of which also includes re-examining issues of ethnicity,

folklore, Balkanism, and even the characteristics of the world music genre. Thus the track “Floyd” (Floyd) from the film *Nacionalna klasa* (National Class, dir. G. Marković), sung by rock icon Dado Topić and female backup vocals, adequately represents not only the main hero’s desired identity, who would like to hide the fact that he comes from a poor working-class family, that he is an eternal boy, but at the same time a womanizer who even at the age of 30 still dreams about becoming a Formula 1 champion, but also the collective identity of Yugoslavia’s youth at the time, who wanted money, fast cars, and a macho life; the track “Lepe ti je Zagorje zelene” (Pretty Is Our Green Zagorje) from *Tito i ja* (Tito and Me, dir. G. Marković), a Bakhtinian grotesque, represents the Yugoslav Marshal’s birthplace in a Caribbean arrangement, as well as, more broadly, Latin American dictators and a state similar to banana republics, also flirting with the birth of the world music genre, whereas the waltz rhythm of the hurdy-gurdy melody in *Nešto između* (Something in Between, dir. S. Karanović) brings together the cultures of the West, oriental Turkey, and Balkan Belgrade, that is, stands as a symbol of the “vicious cycle” and “circus” of relations ensnaring the main protagonists. Those examples are only a small fraction of numerous musics whose semiotic circles – as the author asserts – stretch from individual to collective, class, and national levels. However, the author pursues this complex scholarly engagement not along an “evolutionary” axis, but keeps returning to certain theoretical issues and therefore her presen-

tation comes to occasional “halts”, with digressions “threatening” to effect an explosion of additional questions, but then she deftly “tames” them by returning to examples from Simjanović’s practice. In that way she not only reads music as a “subject” in the complex polyphonic tissue of a cinematic work of art, but also turns her own speaking about that music into a polyphony in which voices about the meaning of music in film intertwine with voices describing its content, compositional technique, stylistic provenance, indicators of genre, etc.

The theoretical thinking of Marija Ćirić, who relies on Yugoslav cinema classics, such as, in addition to those mentioned above, *Sjećaš li se Dolly Bell* (Do You Remember Dolly Bell?, dir. E. Kusturica), *Maratonci trče počasni krug* (The Marathon Family, dir. S. Šijan), *Bal na vodi* (Hey Babu Riba, dir. Jovan Aćin, 1986), *Lepota poroka* (The Beauty of Vice, dir. Ž. Nikolić), as well as a whole series of films from the post-Yugoslav period, will be easy to understand for “domestic” readers, who will therefore have a chance to become active “co-researchers” in the author’s analysis. This makes reading the director-composer play of a given film an exciting “collective” quest in its musical narrative for associations and semiotic circles of a “higher order”.

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